Vol.1

No.1

October 2016

e-ISSN: 2456-5571

RELEVANCE OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF Dr. B.R. AMBEDKAR IN 21ST CENTURY

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Introduction

"Education is not only the birthright of every human being but also a weapon of social change."

- Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

Education is a key of social progress. It helps man to outgrow the crippling influences of ignorance and superstition and enables him to develop his potentialities to the maximum extent possible. It makes man conscious of his rights as well as obligations towards his fellow beings. Therefore, education is the best possible means to bring about an egalitarian society and very important instrument of social change.

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar was a great intellectual of international repute, orator, erudite scholar and prolific writer. The range of his writings includes education, economics, sociology, law, constitution, anthropology, political science, religion and philosophy etc. Dr. Ambedkar brought a new awakening and a sense of social significance and confidence among the deprived section of the society. He waged a relentless war against the Hindu social order for social equality, human dignity and politico-economic empowerment. His primary aim was to make the Dalits of India socially and politically conscious of their human rights. He inspired them to prepare themselves for a revolution through education, organization and agitation.

Dr. Ambedkar states that the true function of philosophy is not only to explain the nature of the world, but also to inspire man for changing it in order to make it a better habitation for mankind. Although philosophy includes in its scope a multifarious range of subjects, yet, Dr. Ambedkar viewed philosophy in his own way. For Dr. Ambedkar, philosophy has a social and ethical meaning, because he wanted it to be a means of social change. Ambedkar was a social philosopher in a more fundamental way. According to him, "Philosophy has its roots in the problems of life and whatever theories philosophy propounds must return to society as instruments of reconstructing society. It is not enough to know. Those who know must endeavour to fulfill." Dr. Ambedkar applied his social philosophy in the field of education and tried to use it as instrument to change the society. He said that learning was essential for every individual if he wished to make progress in the life. He stresses the need of educating the downtrodden for the real social and economic progress of the society. In this paper, an attempt is made to assess Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts on education and study his philosophy of education. It will also try to understand the relevance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's educational philosophy in 21st Century.

Influences on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Indian education system was based on caste system. Education was allowed to only upper castes and it was not open for lower castes like Shudra and Atishudra and even it was not allowed for Women. Hindu Dharmashastras especially Manusmiriti put various restrictions on lowers castes and women. There was no equality and freedom to have education which was mainly responsible to weaken the position of lower caste in Indian Society. Due to lack of education, Dalits' became mentally slave, morally degraded, culturally handicapped, economically weaken and socially backward and there was no social status and dignity. Denial of education made them socially weak. No efforts were taken to educate the lower castes in India and efforts were taken to maintain the caste-based hierarchy by upper castes upto the beginning of the 19th Century. The valiant efforts of Mahatma Jotirao Phule bore fruit and for the first time the schools for the education of women and the untouchables were established in India. Dr. Ambedkar considered him as one

e-ISSN: 2456-5571

of his Guru along with Gautam Buddha and Saint Kabir. He continued the legacy of Mahatma Phule and Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur and spread the education amongst the disadvantaged section of society in India.

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We can find in Ambedkar's life the gualities of a good student as well as a teacher. After graduating from Bombay University, he received M. A. and Ph.D. degrees from the prestigious American University of Columbia and M.Sc. and D.Sc. degree from the reputed London School of Economics. At Columbia he was especially influenced by two of his professors: John Dewey (the initiator of the pragmatic philosophy) and R. A. Seligman, the eminent economist. He also drew inspiration from Booker T. Washington, the founder of the Tuskegee Institute, who promoted education as a means of African American emancipation. Eleanor Zelliot points out that Ambedkar acquired in the United States a strong, unwavering belief in the power of democratic institutions to bring about social equality and that these ideas were to a large extent passed on to him by John Dewey. Dr. Ambedkar fully endorsed Dewey's emphasis on education a means to change the world and not merely to understand it. Education should be capable of creating human values which have universal applicability. Ambedkar carried in him these ideas and spurned the idea of force as against education as an instrument of social change. He firmly believed that education could bring not only a new consciousness among the depressed classes but also impel them toward praxis of self liberation.

His academic career tells us that he was a brilliant academician and later when he came to India, he became the professor at Sydenham College, Government Law College and later became its Principal. He was also the fellow of University of Bombay. He always associated with the different branches of education. He was aware about the present education system of India and its academic and administrative problems. He tried to solve those in proper academic manner. He used his newspapers to spread the idea of education amongst the depressed classes. He delivered number of speeches in order to awaken the youths, students, Dalits and Women which reflect his philosophy of education.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Philosophy of Education

Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy of education can be understood through his writings, speeches, party manifesto and correspondence. He gave prime importance to education in his life. He wanted to reconstruct the structure of Indian society. His approach therefore towards education was more constructive and structural. He considered education as the basis of social, economic and political revolution. For Dr. Ambedkar, education alone creates a sense of new thinking and awakening among the hitherto oppressed people in India. He wanted it for all, and not restricted only to a few classes of society.

As a humanist, Dr. Ambedkar was in favour of imparting education for the development of human personality. In the view of Dr. Ambedkar, education must focus on serving human interests and achieving social amelioration. It ought to aim at human development for which remolding the mind must be the major concern of education. It is only through education that one could enlighten oneself and organize social forces against tyrannical and oppressive elements of traditional societies in India.

Dr. Ambedkar's educational philosophy is seen in the three principles which he inherited from his master Gautam Buddha. They are *Pradnya* (Knowledge or Wisdom), *Sheel* (Character) and *Karuna* (Compassion). He gave lot of importance to these three principles and tried to imbibe them in masses. He says, "Knowledge is the foundation of a man's life". He wanted to imbibe '*Samyak Dyan*' (Right knowledge) as it was propagated by Gautam Buddha in his eight fold path amongst the downtrodden.

He changed the entire mindset of the lower strata of the society towards the education. His philosophy of education was emancipatory in nature. In the name of caste system, lower castes people were systematically made slave of upper castes and established the religious hegemony on them. Ambedkar rejected the Hindu Social Philosophy propounded in Hindu religious scriptures which has made the caste system and the system of graded inequality the law of Hindu Social life. Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy of education aims at creation of a liberating consciousness, which is not just formal education, but the conscientisation process of education, agitation and organization put together.

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Ambedkar's philosophy of education is a philosophy of social emancipation which demands equal rights and opportunities of education for all; it stands for self-respect and self-development; and it also means a social revolution against the evils of social slavery, untouchability, casteism, oppression, etc. along with for removing economic helplessness and disparities in life. Ambedkar's philosophy of education has nothing to do with life beyond the world whereas Ambedkar's emphasis was on secular education for social emancipation. The basic thrust of Ambedkar's philosophy of education, in brief, is to inculcate the values of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and moral character among the boys and girls of all shades.

Dr Ambedkar recognized the education as a vital force for individual development and social change. To him, education could be an effective instrument of mass movement for the safeguard of life and liberty; it could liberate man from social evils; it could mitigate miseries of ignorance and poverty; and education could encourage the oppressed ones to fight and remove injustice and exploitation, to relieve them of their dogmatic beliefs. So Ambedkar was always conscious of the ignorance and backwardness of his poor people due to lack of education among them. In his struggle against caste based discrimination, Ambedkar held that emancipation of Dalits' in India was possible only through the three-pronged approach of "education, agitation and organization". According to Ambedkar, "Illiteracy and ignorance is the greatest hurdle in development of humanity". The root cause of all evils is ignorance, so he took the first step towards removing illiteracy and ignorance. Babasaheb firmly believed that education was the only effective means to uplift the downtrodden. He also believed that it was only through education that the downtrodden could be awakened for their struggle to get their rights. To quote his own words, "My final word of advice to you is Educate, Agitate and Organize, have faith in yourselves." He was instilling the hope, confidence and moral character through his educational philosophy.

As an ardent educationist as he was, and a professor himself, Dr. Ambedkar strongly advocated the spread of universal education among depressed classes who were denied the same for centuries. Denial of education has thrown the Depressed Classes into the morass of ignorance, a slough of despond, perpetual bondage and eternal deprivation. According to Dr. Ambedkar, "Education is not only the birthright of every human being but also a weapon of social change."

Wherever Ambedkar had gone to speak to his people, he emphasized the need of education in order to bring among them awareness about their respect and rights, and thus, he motivated them for education. He used his own intellect and knowledge for the upliftment of society. In order to awaken Dalits and to make conscious of their rights, he gave great importance to education. He used education as a tool for their progress, advancement and social change.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that to achieve progress in socio-economic and political arena, there is no other effective tool other than education. He put forwarded his theory that education is the important mean to develop one's rationality, conscience, scientific temper and consciousness which leads to the personality development. Through education one can end the ignorance of life. He clearly stated that education is a weapon of ending the social slavery, achieve economic progress, political freedom, developmental and intellectual development of one's personality.

According to Ambedkar, 'Material negligence and indifference to knowledge were the reasons behind the backwardness of the Indian people particularly of the lower strata of the society'. He did not visualize education merely as a means of livelihood but as a powerful weapon to liberate the Dalits from ignorance and to strengthen their fight against injustice and humiliation. In fact they considered education as a pre-requisite for any kind of organization and movement of the depressed classes. That is why, his slogan, "Educate, Unite, Agitate" assumed significance and popularity.

Ambedkar gave importance to character along with education. In order to do social changes, educated people should have character. Then he can utilize his No.1

knowledge for the development of human civilization and culture and develop his own personality. The view expressed by Dr. Ambedkar about education is worth quoting "the education that makes us neither competent nor teaches us lessons of equality and morality is no more education." He believed that education is good only if it promotes and preserves the interests of mankind as a whole. He argued that true education creates equality in society, provides food to the hungry people and satisfies for knowledge. He was convinced that it is only education that it is only education that breeds and nourishes the noble sentiments of unity, equality, fraternity and patriotism. Education alone humanizes man. According to him, 'Man, without education, is no better than beast'. He wanted to strengthen the national unity and integrity through education. He asked the educated persons to help their ignorant and illiterates to awaken from their ignorance. Through education. Ambedkar wanted the people to cultivate the values of freedom and equality among themselves.

Dr. Ambedkar demanded the secular pattern of education. He demanded education based on ancient traditions and customs should be given up and its place should be taken by job-oriented education. He said that no schooling should be conducted inside a temple. Separate buildings constructed for the purpose should be utilized. Private institutions running primary or secondary schools may be strictly prohibited to mention in the school register the caste and sub-caste of students.

Another feature of Ambedkar's educational policy was not to beg for donations from industrialists or businessmen; he asked the management to run educational institutions out of fees along with government grants. He was of the view that education is such an indispensable thing that it should necessarily be within easy reach of all. It should be cheap also so that the poorest of the poor may acquire it.

For the steady and systematic upliftment of the downtrodden, he started educational and social institutions and journals and also launched a movement of Satyagraha. Dr. Ambedkar started Mahad Satyagraha in 1927 to achieve the right of Dalits and establishing religions equality. At Mahad, he made a public bonfire of

the Manusmriti, a bible of slavery for untouchables. He awakened the Untouchables by making them aware of their slavery. His slogan, "Tell the slave that he is a slave and he will revolt against his slavery" had a telling effect in that it generated a consciousness in the untouchables and the downtrodden about their plight and the need to secure their human rights.

For the uplift of the depressed classes he developed a programme of education as a part of the general manifesto of Indian Labour Party before the elections of 1937. To stamp out illiteracy, he emphasized the necessity of free and compulsory education. Liberal education, he knew was neither useful for the upper classes in the long run nor for the depressed classes of the Indian Society. He advocated the adoption of diversified technical education. He stressed the necessity of scholarships in educational institutions. Another interesting aspect of his programme of education was the divorce he sought between teaching universities and non-teaching universities.

The Bombay province Depressed Classes Youth Conference was held on 12 February 1938 under the presidentship of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. In this conference, he said that education was a sword and being a double-edged weapon, was dangerous to wield. An educated man without character and humility was more dangerous than a beast. If his education was detrimental to the welfare of the poor, he remarked, the educated man was a curse to society. He emphasized "Character is more important than education."

Dr. Ambedkar addressed a meeting of student of scheduled castes held at Calcutta on 2nd January 1945, where he said to form their own All India Student Federation. He also advised them to concentrate only on education and not to involve in politics. He advised the students not only to get a degree but to see that the degree carried with it some positive knowledge or attainment. Thus, Dr. Ambedkar delivered number of speeches which emphasized on role of education.

Education and Women Empowerment

Dr Ambedkar considered education as an important tool for the emancipation of women. They were

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not allowed to take education with lower castes. It is evident from his speeches that that he had great concern for women empowerment. Addressing the Second All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference held on 20 July 1942 at Nagpur, he said, "I measure the progress of community by the degree of progress which women have achieved. I shall tell you a few things which I think you should bear in mind. Learn to be clean; keep free from all vices. Give education to your children. Instill ambition in them. Inculcate on their minds that they are destined to be great. Remove from them all inferiority complexes". In this way, Dr Ambedkar stressed on education for the progress of women and our country.

With a deep faith in their emancipation, Ambedkar advised them: 'Give education to your children'. He stresses the need of the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of self-help among men and women. He wants them to realize that they owe a great responsibility for educating their children in right way. But at the same time, he advised them: send your children to schools. To him, education is the most important factor for molding the life of all men, women and children.

Ambedkar observes "Education is as necessary for females as it is for males. It you know how to read and write, there would be much progress. As you are, so your children will be mould their lives in virtuous way, for sons should be such as would make a mark in this world." He wanted to liberate women from their suffering and economic dependency. In order to give economic rights and freedom to women, Ambedkar demanded educational rights, equality and right to property for women. To educate women, he asked co-education for women with men. Through education, he believed, that women would think independently which will lead to their intellectual and mental development.

Education and Success of Indian Democracy

For the smooth functioning of Democracy in India he laid greater emphasis on education. Due to the western impact and his own experience in democratic countries, he understood the dire necessity of education for the country like in India. He considered education as an important tool for the eradication of caste system in India and for the better prospects of Democracy in India. He interrelated caste, democracy and education in his own manner and tried to give solution for eradication of caste system.

Dr. Ambedkar said in his speech on Prospects of Democracy in India on 20 May 1956 that "can education destroy caste?" The answer is 'Yes' as well as 'No'. If education is given as it is today, education can have no effect on caste. It will remain as it will be. The glaring example of it is the Brahmin Caste. Cent percent of it is educated, nav, majority of it is highly educated. Yet not one Brahmin has shown himself to be against caste. In fact an educated person belonging to the higher caste is more interested after his education to retain the caste system than when he was not educated. For education gives him an additional interest in the retention of the caste system namely by opening additional opportunity of getting a bigger job. From the point of view, education is not helpful as means to dissolve caste. So far is the negative side of education. But education may be solvent if it is applied to the lower strata of the Indian Society. It would raise their spirit of rebellion. In their present state of ignorance they are the supporters of the caste system. Once their eyes are opened they will be ready to fight the caste system.

The fault of the present policy is that though education is being given on a larger scale, it is not given to the right strata of Indian Society. If you give education to that stratum of Indian Society which has a vested interest in maintaining the caste system for the advantages it gives them, then the caste system will be strengthened. One the other hand, if you give education to the lowest strata of Indian society which is interested in blowing up the caste system, the caste system will be blown you. He wanted to use education as a means to end the caste system. To give education to those who want to keep up the caste system is not to improve the prospect of Democracy in India but to put our Democracy in India in greater jeopardy. Thus he laid great emphasis on the education of lower castes for the better prospects of Democracy in India. He said that education a key to eradicate all types of inequalities and to achieve social democracy.

He considered the chief aim of education is the moralization and socialization of people. He declared that 'Education is the foundation of civilization and culture.'

Bodhi International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science

Ambedkar advised the downtrodden people to take education to openly challenge and annihilate the caste system from Indian society.

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Dr. Ambedkar put lot of emphasis on education to elevate the economic position of Dalits. To end the unjust and unequal social order, there is no alternative other than education for Dalits. Ambedkar believed that through education and knowledge Dalits will gain selfmotivation and self-confidence which will give them power and strength to fight against the unjust social order. That is why along with social movement and educational movement, Ambedkar established educational institutions in different parts of Maharashtra. He established colleges and gave opportunities of higher education to Dalits. He also demanded scholarship, free ships and economic concessions for the spread of education as he was aware of the economic difficulties of students. In constitution, he prescribed many articles for the spread of education. Free and compulsory education was also made as state responsibility under Directive Principles of State Policy. He firmly knew that without education Dalit's cannot achieve any progress in society. That is why he established educational institutes and gave fee concessions, demanded reservation in educational institutes and hostels for the promotion of education.

Ambedkar holds that the greater responsibility for providing educational opportunities should be that of government. The government should also see that these facilities are effectively utilized. He knows that the easier are the govt. opportunities for education to the poor people, the more are the chances for individual development and said progress. He wanted to solve the educational problem through governmental efforts and agencies.

He gave importance to both political and educational movement equally because he knew that without education Dalits cannot capture the important post which will elevate their social position. He believed that education will establish equality between men and women. To end the caste based discrimination he suggested having uniform schools and joint schools for both upper caste and lower caste people rather than separate schools for Dalits. He held that knowledge is power in every field of life. The scheduled caste will not attain their goal of freedom and liberty until they drink deep of all knowledge.

Dr. Ambedkar's Views on University Education

Ambedkar not only stood for primary universal education, but he also urged and emphasized the need of a well-organized university education to meet the social requirements of the poor and the weaker sections of our society. He himself was the fellow of University of Mumbai. He said the chief aim of University should be spread of education amongst the subaltern masses.

Even in regard to higher education, Dr. Ambedkar held that "it is the duty of a modern University to provide facilities for the highest education to the backward communities" and as a necessary corollary suggested that "the backward communities should have some control in the University affairs". He looked upon the University "primarily as a machinery, whereby educational facilities are provided to all those who are intellectually capable of using those facilities to the best advantage, but who cannot avail themselves of those facilities for want of funds or for other handicaps in life." He strongly recommended nomination of members of backward communities on the University senates which functioned like legislative bodies and were supposed to put forth the needs of the backward communities and to suggest the facilities that were necessary for meeting them.

Dr. Ambedkar wishes to see Mumbai University as a prominent centre of higher learning. It should become a centre of creation of knowledge and spread of education through dedicated intellectuals and professors rather than a centre of administrators. He wanted to see University of Mumbai as Professors University where professors will do the research and teaching and contribute for the educational growth of Indian society which will lead to the cultural progress of country. There should be mutual relationship between student and professor. He wishes that the assessment of University should not be based on merely the acquisition of knowledge but it should be based on its social behaviour of University.

In respect of teaching in the colleges and universities, Ambedkar was unhappy with colonial system of education, in British and post-Independent India. October 2016

According to him a Professor "should not only be learned: he must speak in a clear tone. He must be well versed". He also opined that Professors should constantly seek knowledge and try for truth and practice it.

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Dr. B. R. Ambedkar addressed the students' annual gathering at Elphinstone College on 16 December 1952 on "the problems of modern students". He appealed to the students to reorganize university education to meet the requirements of the modern world, and to make the university a place for knowledge and not as centre for training clerks." In this way, Dr. Ambedkar has delivered number of speeches on the reforms in higher education and social inclusion.

Education and State Socialism

As an educationist, Dr. Ambedkar did not merely highlight the advantages of education in theory alone but in practice, he also established an empire of educational institutions. Ambedkar established the People's Education Society in 1945 and its objective is not merely to give education, but to give education in such a manner as to promote intellectual, moral and social democracy. Although Ambedkar started educational institutions through voluntary effort and organizations, he strongly believed in the educational modernization of masses under the auspices of the State. He was fully convinced that the education is one of the best resources to connect the destitute with the main stream of national development. Ambedkar wanted to have community education and it should be given to the lowest strata of the society for the overall development of country.

Dr. Ambedkar was fully convinced that the education is one of the best resources to connect the destitute with the main stream of national development. To establish social justice in caste ridden Indian society, Ambedkar put more emphasis on education. In March 1947, Ambedkar prepared a detailed plan of constitutional provisions and submitted it to the Constituent Assembly under the title 'States and Minorities: What are their Rights and How to secure them in the Constitution of Free India'. In his concept of 'State socialism', he allocated a major role for the State in discharging its duties in respect of education of the unlettered millions of citizens in the

country. He said that it is the duty of state to provide education to all. As a chairman of Drafting Committee (1946-1949), Dr. Ambedkar prescribed many articles in Indian constitution for the educational safeguards of disadvantaged classes of Indian society. He provided freeships, scholarships and opportunity of higher education in India and abroad for Dalits. He provided Fundamental Rights and also guided the states through Directive Principles for welfare state.

Conclusion

Thus, Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy of education was the blend of rational and secular philosophy of Gautam Buddha and the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey. Dr. Ambedkar's three word formula – 'educate, agitate and organize' is a powerful tool of social change even today. Ambedkar made the oppressed lot of the depressed classes conscious of their rights, which was denied to them for centuries. Educating the downtrodden people, he thought, was a sure way to instill in them a sense of consciousness, self-respect and dignity. He wanted the people to cultivate the values of freedom and equality among themselves; it was possible only through education. This is turn would provide the necessary cultural basis for their progressive assimilation into the mainstream of an enlightened national life.

Dr. Ambedkar was a symbol of knowledge and character. He regarded education as a means to reach the doors of light and perception to remove the regions of darkness and ignorance. He used his philosophy of education to make aware of the condition of social degeneration in Hindu society among the lower strata of society and change the social order for the benefit of entire humanity. Through his educational institutes, he strives for educational development of all. He was an 'organic intellectual' in real sense. Dr. Ambedkar's contribution towards education and his independent thinking made him an independent intellectual of the world. He propounded his own philosophy of education and had largely influenced the outlook of downtrodden. In order to honour his brilliant academic career his statue is placed at the entrance London School of Economics and below that "Symbol of Knowledge" is written. It shows that how he was acclaimed

e-ISSN: 2456-5571

as great student and educationist of far excellence. Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts on education and his educational philosophy are relevant even today in the 21st Century for the socio-economic and political development of our country.

"So long as you do not achieve social liberty, whatever freedom is provided by the law is of no avail to you"

- Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, India's first Law Minister.

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